

Mountain Democrat

PLACERVILLE, CALIFORNIA



Youngsters cool off in the sprinklers at Pioneer Park in Somerset where Caldor Fire survivors gathered Saturday to mark one year since the 220,000-plus acre blaze devastated the community of Grizzly Flat. Mountain Democrat photo by Eric Jaramishian

News

Caldor Fire remembrance brings Grizzly Flat together

By Eric Jaramishian



One year after the Caldor Fire began residents of Grizzly Flat come together at Pioneer Park with food provided by the El Dorado Community Foundation

Caldor Fire survivors of Grizzly Flat were reunited Saturday at Pioneer Park in south county and although many were displaced from their community, they never lost fellowship.

The El Dorado West Slope Foundation played host to the event marking one year since the Caldor Fire first sparked — Aug. 14, 2021.

Spirits were high at Pioneer Park. Many volunteers from local nonprofits helped make the gathering eventful but not too emotionally bearing, some said.

“I didn’t want it to be an emotional event but being able to see our friends and our neighbors that we haven’t seen in a long time is bittersweet,” said Amanda Akins, whose family remains displaced after the fire. “I didn’t feel like we were just here to mourn. It was more about just us getting together to have fun and enjoy each other’s company.”

“It’s fun for us, especially the kids, to see all our old neighbors. That’s one of the reasons I’m here,” said Tim Ohman, who lost his home as well.

Representatives from several organizations, including the Food Bank of El Dorado County, Federated Church in Placerville, Upper Room Dining Hall, the El Dorado County Sheriff’s Office and Pioneer Fire Protection District, showed up to volunteer or show support for the Grizzly Flat community.

“This is a really special community,” said Pioneer Fire Chief Dave Whitt. “It’s not unlike a lot of other foothill communities but we have a sense of togetherness and oneness here.”

Food, live music and rock painting were all part of the experience. Children kept cool playing in the sprinklers.

The West Slope Foundation’s long-term recovery goal is to make survivors “feel that there’s hope, someone out there to help them, that they can come to us for help,” said West Slope Foundation Executive Director Scot Telfer.

Hosting a remembrance hits close to home for Telfer and West Slope Foundation Outreach Director Jennifer McKim-Hibbard, both residents of Grizzly Flat.

“This is a community that helps our community,” McKim-Hibbard said. “I lost my home. Scot was evacuated. Everybody on our advisory committee was evacuated so we all understand what the need is because it’s our backyard. It’s our homes, our friends and family that were all impacted.

“When we saw that need for boots on the ground, we formed the West Slope Foundation and haven’t looked back since.”

The food bank held a gathering for Caldor Fire survivors and victims back in April.

When asked if they would do this again, McKim-Hibbard and Telfer confirmed to the Mountain Democrat plans to hold a Nov. 12 fundraiser to assist in recovery efforts. The event, dubbed Out of the Ashes, is planned for Element 79 Vineyards and Winery in Fair Play.

One word in particular is on the community members’ minds — preparedness.

“Unfortunately, this happened to the Grizzly Flat community and a lot of us weren’t prepared,” said McKim-Hibbard. “It’s only a matter of time before it’s the next community that is struck. Get prepared; make sure you have enough fire insurance and an evacuation plan.”

Subscribe to our free Morning Edition newsletter

email address

Subscribe

